

James Whitall House

National Park, Gloucester County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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James Whitall House
National Park, Gloucester County, New Jersey

Owner: The United States

Date of Erection: 1748

Architect:

Builder: James Whitall

Present Condition: Excellent

Number of Stories: Two and one-half

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - main
section brick, stone
wing

Interior walls - plaster
occasional panel

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - pitch, wood
shingles

Historical Data:

On the north gable of the house is to be seen the letters "I. A. W." and the date "1748" indicating that the builder was James and Ann Whitall; Ann Whitall was born Cooper. She was a sister of John Cooper, a member of the Continental Congress in 1776. James was the son of Job and Jane (Siddon) Whitall who had settled near Red Bank in 1722. He

was a member of the Committee on Correspondence and Observation. When hostilities broke out James and his wife and their son Job and his wife were living in the house at Red Bank.

An attempt was made to keep the British out of Philadelphia and two forts were built on the Delaware; one where the Schuylkill enters into Delaware called Fort Mifflin, and the other directly across the river on the Whitall property. Possession was taken of the Whitall property, and Job Whitall records in his diary for October 10, 1777 that the American "Militia turned us out of our kitchen ye largest room upstairs and ye shop and took our hay to feed their horses". We are told that on October 12, 1777, Colonel Green took fifteen tons of hay, sixty bushels of wheat, 1000 cedar boards, 85,550 rails, 2,048 stakes, and 50 white oak posts. Besides this the barn and the hay house of Whitall's were torn down. His pailed gardens were cut down and his apple orchard of three hundred grafted trees was likewise destroyed.

The old gentleman rendered a bill to the Legislature of New Jersey under the date of April 17, 1779 for damages done to his property by the American forces. This bill was five thousand seven hundred and sixty pounds one shilling. Since the currency of New Jersey was very much depreciated at the time, it was not as large a sum of money would appear at first glance. Incidentally, Whitall was not paid. His bill, however, shows that the first breaking of the ground was April 16, 1777, which may be considered the beginning of the fort.

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When Count Donop and his Hessian soldiers left Haddonfield on October 22, he told John Gill (NJ-207) with whom he had stayed that he was on his way to Fort Mercer. Gill warned the Whitall family by a messenger. Job Whitall records in his diary for October 22, 1777, the following:

"Ye boys and myself hung a gate in ye meadow and John and I went to finish ye stacks (hay) and our women blowed ye horn and we went home and got our horses and wagon and loaded it with goods. Ye reason was because ye English troops were close by. We ate some dinner and my wife, children and myself went off in our wagon. Father, Mother and ye boys stayed. We got to Uncle David Coopers and stayed awhile and I went back again on horseback. Uncle David and James Cooper each sent a boy down to fathers to help me away with some cattle..... This same day ye people in ye fort drove from Father and me 47 sheep into ye fort."

The Whitall House was used for a hospital after the Battle of Red Bank. The desperately wounded Hessians were arranged in the lower rooms of the Whitall Mansion; those who had a better chance of surviving were placed in the upstairs rooms. The surgeon in charge of the wounded was Seth Bowen of Bridgeton. Ann Whitall helped nurse the wounded. Count Donop who was fatally wounded, was moved to the Lowe house south of Woodbury Creek where he died. The men who died in the Whitall house were buried in the bank to the south of the fort.

One of the stories told about the old Quakeress Ann Whitall, is concerned with a skirmish that took place two days after the Battle of Red Bank. Mrs. Whitall was spinning in a room on the second floor when a cannon ball pierced the gable end of the house, penetrating the hall and the room in which she was spinning. According to the story, she took her spinning wheel to the cellar and continued to spin until the battle was over. Other versions of this story connect the incident with the main battle.

Job Whitall writes in his diary for October 22, 1777 that:

"The Americans had filled the kitchen, shop, big room, the long room upstairs and two other down stairs which forced me to move out."

Ann Whitall left the house on the twenty-fifth and went to Woodbury. The British returned on November 21, destroyed the fort, and looted the Whitall house. The Whitalls were forced to leave the house and did not return until April 20, 1778.

De Chastellux in his travels in North America in 1780 mentions a visit to the home of James Whitall with Lafayette, De Noailles, and Du Plessis Mauduit. The old gentleman refused to look at, or greet his visitors. It was Du Plessis who had ordered destruction of the Whitall buildings in order to obtain lumber.

Samuel Mickle records the deaths in the Whitall family by yellow fever in his diary for February, 1798. In making the entry in which he records the deaths of Ann, her son Job, three of Job's children, and a girl living with the family, he mentions other "scenes of distress" as he calls them, which took place on the Whitall farm. He tells of the apple orchard that was cut down with the erection of the fort, and the dwelling house which was battered by the artillery and the dead lying on the ground naked except in part covered with a little straw. Mickle entered the death of James Whitall in his diary in 1809. Whitall was then ninety-two years old.

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Walter C. Keith
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, A.I.A.
District Officer

Rev. Jan. 25, 37 T.W.